

**SUMMARY OF THE
TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 23, 2001**

The Transition Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Wednesday, May 23, 2001, at 8:00 a.m. Mountain Daylight Time (MDT) as part of the Seventh NELAC Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT. The meeting was led by its chair, Ms. Silky Labie of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to discuss currently proposed changes to provisions for transition, and to discuss other items on the committee's agenda.*

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Labie introduced herself, and the committee members introduced themselves to the audience. Ms. Labie reviewed the mandate for this committee, and then asked if there were any changes to the previous committee minutes. The previous minutes were approved.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Ms. Labie provided an overview of the committee's recent activities, and their agenda for the meeting.

RESULTS OF NELAC QUESTIONNAIRE

Ms. Labie presented an overview of the questionnaire developed by the Transition Committee to solicit information and comments from the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) accredited laboratories. This questionnaire was distributed by the American Council of Independent Laboratories (ACIL). Because the data is still arriving back from the laboratories and has not yet been analyzed, she suggested that discussion of this topic be deferred until a later date. It was also suggested that this committee form a workgroup to review the raw data from the questionnaires, assist with data analysis, and help decide how to present the data. The committee volunteers are Mr. Jerry Parr, Dr. Marcia Davies, Ms. Ann Marie Allen, and Mr. Jack Farrell.

DEVELOPMENT OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

The committee has been dealing with the issue of communication problems between the various stakeholders in the NELAC community and feels that there is an urgent need for an objective party to help with the communication and resolution of problems. To this end, they developed a paper defining the problem, which was included in the March 15, 2001 committee minutes. They developed a set of recommendations that included the need to identify a clearing house as a focal point for the stakeholders. The committee felt that the most likely type of organization would be non-profit.

At this point, Mr. Parr introduced a non-profit organization that was still in the early stages of conceptual development. He said that he had investigated several organizations to take on this task, and did not find any that were suitable. He then proceeded to create a new organization, including drafting articles of incorporation and bylaws. The goal is to have a new organization that represents all stakeholders fairly. At this time, several individuals have tentatively agreed to serve on the board of the new organization, including Dr. Wilson Hershey, Ms. Jackie Sample, Ms. Carol Batterton, Mr. Chuck Wibby, and Dr. Harry Gearheart. The organization would be a membership organization which anyone (individual or organization) could join. The proposed roles of the organization would include the following:

- helping with the administration of NELAC,
- being the focal point for stakeholder concerns,
- conducting the interim meeting,
- managing the NELAC database,
- managing the NELAC Website,
- providing assessor training,
- establishing a communications hotline,
- establishing a PT oversight body,
- providing meeting support services (including scribing and providing minutes),
- and coordinating the services currently provided by NELAC EPA contractors.

The organization would be a 501c3 organization. Mr. Parr stated that the funding for the non-profit organization (tentatively named the Association for Accreditation of Environmental Laboratories) would hopefully come primarily from an EPA contract, with additional funds coming from membership dues (individual and organizational) and conference attendance fees.

Neither the proposed board of directors nor the Transition Committee have had an opportunity to review the articles of incorporation or the bylaws, and no presentation of this concept has been made to the NELAC Board of Directors (BoD) yet, though they have been made aware that the concept is in development. It was agreed that the committee needs to schedule a formal presentation of this concept to the BoD, to be presented by Mr. Parr. The committee was encouraged to solicit input from all stakeholders during construction of the organization, and to provide for a complete review of the articles and bylaws by legal counsel and by affected state and federal agencies.

The list of actions includes:

- development of a name,
- filing of articles of incorporation,
- finalizing the bylaws,
- review of bylaws by appropriate parties,
- and initiation of discussion regarding interrelationships between the organization and all stakeholders.

COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

Ms. Deborah Loring stated that there certainly was a need for laboratories to have a voice when a difference of opinion exists with standard interpretation or other similar issues, but noted that the Accrediting Authority Committee has made substantial progress on this issue, and that this committee should recognize and support their efforts.

SECONDARY ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Ms. Labie asked the audience and committee what problems they have encountered with secondary accreditation requirements. Several individuals expressed that secondary accreditation has been very complex, and more difficult and time-consuming than primary accreditation. They expressed a need to have the application process and application forms be more similar for both types of accreditation. According to several committee members and audience members, some secondary agencies are requesting more information, more files, standard operating procedures (SOPs), quality assurance (QA) manuals, proficiency test (PT) results, training records, and other information to be copied and sent, whereas the primary accrediting agency might review this information on-site. The committee agreed that there needs to be a set of guidelines to help with this problem, and that they would form a subcommittee to develop a straw man to submit to the appropriate committees (Accrediting Authority and On-site Assessment) for review. Volunteers for this workgroup are Dr. Irene Ronning, Ms. Ilona Taunton, and Dr. Hershey.

HARMONIZING STATE AND NELAP ACCREDITATIONS

The committee agreed that this issue has received substantial attention from other committees, including Accrediting Authority, and that no discussion of this topic was needed at this meeting.

CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

Ms. Labie asked to have a discussion about consumer expectations of NELAP, and their expectations of a NELAP-accredited laboratory. Ms. Davies replied that as an agency hoping to benefit from the accreditation process, it has been difficult to get the information they need about the laboratory accreditation and qualifications from the specific AA, which affects their ability to fully accept the laboratory's accreditation. She asked how this information is to be communicated to a client or agency, what information they are allowed to have access to, and who is responsible for providing the information. Others agreed that this issue will be ongoing, especially for clients and agencies utilizing laboratory services, and that some resolution needs to be developed.

Another issue is client expectation of NELAP accreditation by a laboratory for a project for which that accreditation is inappropriate or irrelevant. Mr. Parr stated that it needs to be clearly communicated to clients and agencies what a NELAP accreditation is and is not, namely that it is a certificate of competence. Others stated that it is unreasonable to expect the AAs to maintain huge databases of information from the laboratories, and to be required to provide voluminous data to clients and agencies utilizing those laboratories' services.

Many data users stated that while NELAC is a “driver’s license,” the data user would continue to monitor and audit laboratories for project specific data.

Representatives of several agencies expressed the urgency of their need for confidence in laboratory data, and their need for cooperation from the laboratories and from the accrediting authorities in communicating laboratory qualifications and competence.

NEW ISSUES AND NEXT STEPS

The issue was raised of implementation timing and deadlines, and the constraints they place on accrediting authorities. The specific issue was the 180-day deadline for the requirement located at 6.3.1(d)(1) in the NELAC Standard. Because of the preoccupation with implementing NELAP and announcing the first laboratories, the information requests for renewal were delayed, and the assessment teams are just beginning the process of reviewing the submitted information. A request was made to extend the current renewal process and the NELAP recognition by at least 60 days. The attendee requested that the committee make this recommendation to present his request to the BoD. The committee agreed to recommend to the BoD that the NELAP director have the option of extending the time for renewal application and/or accrediting authority recognition [as stated in 6.3.1(d)(1)] by 60 days with the contingency that if problems persist beyond 60 days, that the NELAC Director seek the concurrence of the Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB) and/or the BoD for a continuance if needed.

Ms. Labie suggested that the next teleconference be devoted to a detailed discussion of the non-profit organization development concept.

ADJOURNMENT

There were no further items raised by the audience or committee members. Ms. Labie thanked the audience for their attendance and their participation, and adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:30 a.m.

**ACTION ITEMS
TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 23, 2001**

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Questionnaire Subcommittee to review the results of the ACIL questionnaire, and format the results for presentation to the BoD, the AA Workgroup, and any affected standing committees.	September 1
2.	Subcommittee for Secondary Accreditation to draft a straw man application package for consideration by the AA Workgroup, On-site Assessment and Accrediting Authority.	July 1
3.	Ms. Labie to submit a recommendation to the BoD concerning a 60 day extension option for the renewal process and accrediting authority recognition.	May 31, 2001
4.	Committee to consider the proposed non-profit organizations, its relationship to NELAC, and ramifications of such an organization	June 1

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TRANSITION COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 23, 2001**

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